

GOD'S
meaning in Life

McComb

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**GOD'S MEANING
IN LIFE**

BOOKS BY
SAMUEL McCOMB, D.D.

GOD'S MEANING IN LIFE

PRAYER—What It Is and What It Does

FAITH—The Greatest Power in the World

THE NEW LIFE—The Secret of Happiness and Power

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
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GOD'S meaning in Life

by
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AUTHOR OF
"FAITH" "PRAYER" ETC.



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TO
MRS KATE L. GILBERT
AS A TOKEN OF FRIENDSHIP AND GRATITUDE
I INSCRIBE THIS LITTLE BOOK

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FOREWORD

“The argumentation of my essay on the immediate data of the human mind shows that there exists such a thing as liberty. In *Matter and Memory* I tried to prove the existence of the spirit. My book, *Creative Evolution*, leaves no doubt—I hope so, at least—about the reality of creation. The conclusion of this is that there is a God, free creator of the world, maker of matter as well as of life, whose creative effort aims at life by the evolution of species and the constitution of human personalities.”

HENRI BERGSON.

“They who think with me that, though it is a hard thing for us to believe that we are made in the likeness of God, it is yet a very necessary thing, will not be anxious to deny that an effectual trust in this great truth, a full satisfaction of this ethical need, are among the natural fruits of a Christian theory of the world.”

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

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I

“DO WE NEED GOD?”

AN earlier age was very much concerned with high speculative arguments and proofs of the existence of a Deity. To-day those reasonings fail to interest us. We feel that even if they could establish all they set out to do, we still would be left with our vital needs unsatisfied.

Granted that you could prove the existence of a Cause adequate to account for the universe of matter and of mind, or could show that the sum of things exhibits “a dramatic tendency, a clearly marked prog-

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ress of events toward a mighty goal," to be explained only by the working of a Master Dramatist, of what avail would such achievements be to meet the demands of life or satisfy the ineradicable cravings of heart and soul?

Our deepest desire is for comradeship, warmth, and blessedness, a sense of harmony with ourselves and with the universe. The bloodless categories of philosophic thought can never give us these things. Moreover, our ambitious attempts to compass the unbounded are doomed to failure.

The agnosticism of a generation ago has not passed without teaching us a much-needed lesson. It has shown us how great the word "God" is. For now we know that either God is everything to us, or He is nothing. He is either the supreme basic Reality into which all other realities run down, and in which they find a meaning, or else He is the empty, baseless figment of our imagination.

Hence we must treat with tenderness and comprehension those who, because of

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the very greatness of the assertion, have not the courage to say that they believe in God. Further, this agnostic spirit has made all dogmatisms, whether in science or religion, henceforth impossible. Around and beneath us are fathomless abysses. The laws of nature are simply convenient symbols which we use to express a small portion of an inexpressible whole.

Our scientific certainties are being constantly threatened with dissolution by some fresh discovery or some newer insight into the facts.

“Canst thou by searching find out God?” asks an ancient sage. We, too, might ask, “Canst thou by searching find out the secret of the world or of the living self?”

But agnosticism is partial. Its function is preliminary and negative. It helps to clear the air, tainted with the vapors of superstition, that the fires of faith may burn more brightly.

To-day we are facing an immensely significant spiritual situation. The fact is unquestionable that men realize, as they

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never realized before, that without a God of some kind life is intolerable, and the world drama is no drama at all, but a meaningless series of events which only beguile us with an empty appearance of reason and purpose.

The names and characteristics ascribed to God are as various as the minds which conceive them. But beneath the variety there is unity. The demand is for a Power in alliance with which man can realize himself and achieve his destiny.

Here and there an individual may be found who rejects both the name and reality of God; yet even such belated spirits maintain that the attitude of soul which belief in a God implies must remain even after the belief has vanished, if man is to attain his highest and live in conformity with his better self.

Mr. H. G. Wells, unable to find a God in the calm of his own study, makes his wonderful discovery in the blood-stained trenches of France and Belgium. He is spokesman for thousands of others whose

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skepticism has been profoundly shaken by the tragic events of the time.

Our day, to use the language of the New Testament, is one of the “days of the Son of Man”—a day of reckoning red with judgment and terror, a day which summons all men to take counsel of their hearts, to make account of their inner resources, to get face to face with the primary meanings of things.

The unexamined life is impossible at the present time to any man in whom there is still unquenched a single spark of serious thought. Prof. Gilbert Murray has recently said that “what would have been deemed, before the outbreak of the world-tragedy, romance, and melodrama, has become the commonplace experience of multitudes of commonplace persons.” The man in the street has suddenly become conscious of deep promptings, of worlds not realized. To his eye the universe has suddenly unveiled itself as something infinitely mysterious, enigmatic, and even menacing.

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Out of this unwonted experience many are asking to-day with poignant sincerity: Do we need God? If so, what kind of a God is it that we need?

The man who asks this question is making a great discovery about himself. He learns that he is greater than all his thinking, that his utmost powers of reason and understanding come out of a self in whose unconscious depths there are needs, impulses, cravings, instincts that are the driving forces of his life. It is because of these needs that there wells up a yearning for satisfaction, which the world denies us.

We make a claim on life which is contradicted by life as it is actually lived. We long for a good which we do not possess. But this contradiction cannot be borne; the whole man cries out against it and gropes in the dark for some Power able to bring about a reconciliation.

So much is this the case that Voltaire's oft-quoted saying that "if there were no God, it would be necessary to invent

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one,” contains, in spite of its flippant cynicism, a profound truth. We begin not with high abstract ideas, from which we descend upon the concrete and living world, but with human nature as seen in ourselves and in others. We are impelled to seek for some Reality large enough to answer the demand of our discovery.

In other words, the emphasis has been transferred from abstract thought to the vital full-blooded facts of subjective experience.

“God exists,” says Mazzini. “I am not bound to prove this to you, nor shall I endeavor to do so; to me the attempt would seem blasphemous, as the denial appears madness. He who can deny God, either in the face of a star-lit night, when standing beside the tomb of those dearest to him, or in the presence of martyrdom, is either greatly unhappy or greatly guilty.”¹

It is here that some would say: “I am conscious of no such need of which you

¹*Duties of Man*, chap. ii.

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speaking. To me the language of religion sounds foreign and unreal. I am sufficient unto myself. No discontent, divine or otherwise, vexes my mind. Social fellowship, the enjoyment of art and literature, the ever-expanding interests of the world which enlist my intensest regard—these things so occupy the field of my conscious needs that I have neither room nor desire for the influx of help or hope from some super-human sphere.”

Reflect. You are not ordinarily conscious of the air without which your physical life would perish, nor do you always realize that every ounce of energy you put forth streams from the sun flaming in the heavens. These things come home to you only when heat or atmosphere is seriously disturbed. Must there not be, then, in the unconscious region of your inner life, an invisible environment out of which unconsciously you draw what you need for spiritual sustenance?

Just as our physical power to walk and speak has the sun for its source, though

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this fact dawns on us only when our attention is called to it, so our spiritual life, our power to think and love and will, must have for its fountain-head an adequate Source, and this source we call God.

But man is called to realize consciously what he owns unconsciously. To realize himself, he must grasp the purpose of his being and consciously co-operate with it.

Now, unconscious dependence on God becomes conscious under, it may be, the strain of some experience; a bitter moral failure; a frustrated hope; the sudden stroke of death laying low a life more dear to us than all else; the vision of the world's grave inequalities and pain; or simply the gradual maturing of one's nature, which consists in part in bringing into the clear light of rational vision what lies hidden in the unconscious realm. Then the human need becomes so imperious that nothing less than God will suffice to answer it. Self-sufficiency, to the mind whose soul in some hour of adversity has been profoundly stirred, seems the merest irony.

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A great modern writer makes a man in dire moral need say to a woman who had suffered greatly:

“And you—you often pray to God, Sonia?”

“What could I be, what should I be, without God?”

“And what does God do for you?” he asked.

“God does everything for me!” was Sonia's answer.¹

And the inevitable God is not an alien or foreign Being. The soul but opens its eyes to behold a God, who, unrecognized, was present all the while.

What then are some of the needs which urge the soul to seek for God?

¹Dostoïeffsky, *Crime and Punishment*, pt. iv, chap. iv.

II

GOD AND OUR IDEALS

HUMAN life is a fragment even when taken at its best. Whatever else may be said of man, this, at any rate, is true. As Robert Louis Stevenson says, "Whatever else we were made for, it was not for success."

Here then is the strange and puzzling paradox. Man is a fragment that knows he is a fragment, and by that very knowledge testifies to the hidden presence of a perfect whole. Man sees the chasm between what he is and what he ought to be; but what he ought to be is the reality to which he is pledged in the inmost essence of his being.

He belongs to the world of the true, the beautiful, and the good. Everywhere

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in his deeper experience the presence of a greater self is implied. These ideals which, however often mocked, still cast their lure upon his heart—whence come they? Without them man would be a thing, not a living personality.

“The man who has no refuge within himself, who lives, so to speak, in his front rooms, in the outer whirlwind of things, is not properly a personality at all; he is not distinct, free, original, a cause—in a word, *someone*. He is one of a crowd, a taxpayer, an anonymity, but not a man. . . . The man who has no inner life is the slave of his surroundings, as the barometer is the obedient slave of the air at rest, and the weathercock the humble servant of the air in motion.”¹

These ideas, which thus distinguish the human spirit from every other form of sentient existence, differ from things in this respect, that they are as they are known; they belong to what is most fundamental in life, to what gives life all

¹Amiel's *Journal* (Eng. trans.), p. 114.

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the significance that it has, whereas things may be very different from what they seem to be to the mind that apprehends them.

Here, then, we reach something eternal appearing in man, and commanding with august authority his reverent homage, but not created by him. All who obey the voice of conscience are unanimous in their testimony that it is no fancy of theirs that summons them to suffer or to dare, but an imperative authority which stands over against them in constraining majesty, and speaks not by any delegated, but by a native, right.

Those who try to ignore this voice, who live on the lower levels of naturalism undisturbed by any contact with a diviner world, bear witness to the same truth. For sooner or later Life pierces them with a terrible word—

“All things betray thee who betrayest Me.”

This is the root of the dissatisfaction of which so many complain. They are dissatisfied with their place, or with their work,

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or with their income, but at rare moments they are startled with a deeper thought—*they are dissatisfied with themselves.*

Is this a sign of morbidity, the mark of a sick soul, as some would say? On the contrary, it is a sign of life, an indication that all is not dead within. We could not condemn ourselves if no vision, however vague, of some desired ideal had not flashed upon the mind. Self-condemnation is possible only by reference to some higher standard than the self which is condemned.

Now God is the embodiment of all our ideas. It is He who gives them reality and substance. Without Him we never could feel them to be anything more than the product of fancy. Just because He is the substance of our ideals there is no rest and no peace till we surrender to Him, for in yielding to Him we are yielding to our best self. We are realizing the ideal manhood or ideal womanhood to which our creation pledges us.

It is here that we touch upon the secret

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of the ineffectiveness of so many lives. They are the result of a weak and futile compromise. In the political and social spheres, compromise is a necessity and even a virtue; in the spiritual realm it spells disaster, for it means division, lack of unity of aim and purpose.

Those who compromise are not at one with themselves; their inner life is in a state of conflict—and this means a state of weakness and inefficiency.

There is hope, glorious and abundant hope, for the man who commits himself unreservedly to the ideal; there is even hope for the man who gives himself absolutely to evil, because he will discover in due season that the universe is not so made that evil in the long run can triumph. He will learn that in suppressing the admonitions of his better self, and in confining his life within the limits of the purely natural, he is trying to do the impossible, to follow a way of life which implies a fundamental spiritual contradiction.

But what hope is there for the man who

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shilly-shallies between good and evil, who now ranges himself on the side of the spirit, and now on the side of its relentless enemies? There is no hope for such a man in this world, or, so far as one can see, in any other world.

It is a deep truth of experience that with God it is all or nothing. When we give Him all, He returns our all back to us only with a new fullness of meaning and with new and higher ambitions to be realized.

Out of surrendering to Him comes unity and strength and growth. We no longer spin, as it were, upon our own axis, but are swept along in the grasp of a central sun of purity, goodness, and grace. We know the bloom of springtide and the fruit of summer.

The old animal life, with its sin and selfishness, its small and petty aims, now seems to us the most barren of barren things. On us has dawned the glory of self-sacrifice and goodness, which have the promise and potency of ever new developments of beauty and power.

III

GOD THE GREAT COMPANION

“**F**RRIENDSHIP,” says Aristotle, “is indispensable to life. For nobody will choose to live without friends, although he were in possession of every other good.”

The value of friendship lies in the need of that perfect understanding which the soul craves, a sharing of its pleasures and pains, an interchange of thought and encouragement, and of moral strength. But in every human friendship there lies, implicitly, a friendship of another and a higher order.

We idealize our friends. We attribute to them qualities which at best they possess only potentially; and when they fail us we weep the bitter tears of an infinite

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loss. If beyond and above our human friends there is no Other, if their goodness and sympathy are the only goodness and sympathy that exist, then indeed we are the victims of a tragic fate. For love is ever seeking to go beyond the temporal and the visible to mingle with the vastness of the infinite and divine.

It is true that some, while rejoicing in visible friends, find it impossible to realize friendship with the Invisible. Yet from a psychological point of view there is no line of demarcation between friendship with our fellow-men and friendship with God. Both spring out of profound necessities of nature.

My consciousness is, by its very constitution, something which implies that others have experiences in common with me, and that we can share these experiences mutually. In other words, sociality is not an accident of human nature, it is one of its structural principles. Yet this inborn instinct can atrophy by disuse. We can, as Professor Coe says, deperson-

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alize our fellows until they seem to be little more than things. Only by loving, helping, and serving them do they become real to us as persons. It is as we thus set aside our own self-seeking aims, and identify ourselves with others, that we rise to the conviction that there is a common Will worthy of our utmost devotion. This common Will is God operative in us. We rise to friendship with Him through the cultivation of the impulses which urge to friendship with our fellow-men.

And yet there is an area in every life to which friends have no access. It is from one point of view a pathetic reflection, that every man, the humblest as well as the greatest, carries within him a world of thought and desire and emotion unshared by any other creature.

Our every thought is a soliloquy. All our mental history is simply a debate in which the speakers are the solitary, single self. Of its joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, how little can be communicated to

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another mind! Yet its experiences constitute the deepest reality of our lives. To understand all is to forgive all, say the French; but the difficulty lies in the understanding. Unscalable barriers divide personality from personality. Hence we mistake the motives of our fellows, and in our blindness and ignorance misjudge them and strike cruel blows at their happiness and peace.

“No soul touches another soul except at one or two points,” says F. W. Robertson, himself one of the loneliest of men, “and these chiefly external”—a fearful and a lonely thought, but one of the truest of life.

There are moments when consciousness of this inner solitude comes home to even the most frivolous. Who that has stood beneath a star-strewn sky at midnight, and has glanced at the myriad suns which make the brilliance of the Milky Way, has not felt affrighted, overwhelmed, by the immensity of the physical universe over against the littleness and loneliness of human life?

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Or, turning from the outer to the inner sphere, who that has wandered even for a brief space in the corridors of memory, haunted with the ghosts of the past, the apparitions conjured up by unhappiness or guilt, has not felt like some wretched prisoner condemned to solitary confinement which turns existence into a horror and which, if not relieved by a healing presence, may end in the madness of despair?

These are the moments when the soul breaks through the conventionalities, the small and petty round of trivial thought, and stands face to face with infinite mystery, feeling itself like the ancient mariner:

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea;
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemèd there to be.

As we grow intellectually and spiritually our loneliness deepens. We yearn for some kindred spirit to look into our hearts and to read us as we are, but too often no such spirit answers the call.

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Some who have come to us with the promise of deliverance have failed us. They are too self-centered, too prosaic, too lacking in imaginative insight. Or they have not that mystic gift before which every door of the soul flies open and we enter into the joy of a comradeship that fills life with satisfaction, brings strength to every burden, and unity to all our sundered powers.

Every sincere and thoughtful spirit must long for some one with whom to open up intercourse of thought and feeling, by whom to have itself understood, to have all its inner complexities and contradictions cleared up, and all its secrets brought into the clear light of consciousness.

Modern physicians tell us how the maladies of a "shut-in personality"—hidden fears, desires, distresses, irrationalities, in brief, thoughts and wishes which the sufferer drives out of his conscious life only to keep them alive and active in the unconscious—may be overcome by simply convincing him that he is understood, that

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these intimate experiences are no longer his own private possession, but are shared by another.

This cleansing and healing process, so necessary to the abnormal, is not less necessary to the normal. The great and formative experiences of the spiritual life are essentially lonely—sin, sorrow, temptation, and the growth of a moral or spiritual purpose.

Temptation may have its occasion, but not its cause, in an object which appeals to others as well as to oneself, yet the real force of the trial depends upon one's own character, and the special appeal which challenges one's own desires.

Each man must fight his own battle, and he must fight it alone. The tempter and the tempted must struggle in a wilderness where no mortal eye can mark the tragedy or the triumph.

So, too, is it with the experience of sorrow. The instinct of the newly smitten heart is to go apart in silence and retirement; in the dark hour of desolation the

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soul knows that it is beyond the sympathy of its fellows. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness."

It is in moral solitude also that we dream every noble dream of being and of doing good. Our dreams seem the most shadowy of wraiths when confronted by the harsh realities of waking experience. Yet to these visions we must be loyal even if our loyalty should cause us to taste the experience of a great Christian soul of the fourth century. Of him it was said "he had only two friends, God and death; the one the defender of his innocence, the other the finisher of his troubles."

With the dropping away of human associations we turn by instinct to a super-human companionship. In the experience of moral failure it becomes possible for us, through free and open speech with God, to bear the vision of ourselves in the strength that comes from the belief that He is at once the embodiment of justice and sympathy; the "All-knowing" who is also the "All-loving," in whose unerring

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insight we take refuge alike from our self-despair and our self-complacency.

In the strain and stress of moral trial, one has but to turn the attention from the pleasant sin with all its tawdry attraction, and fix it upon the invisible and silent Presence that sees all and notes all, and out of the subconscious will rise sacred and beautiful memories to rob evil of its glamour and lift the soul in triumphant energy above its foes.

In the pressure of grief, let the prayer of affliction rise to the mighty fatherhood of God, and the burden is eased. We cherish a faith stronger than death; we no longer despair of life; we distrust our fears and believe our hopes.

The realization that God is the ally of our ideals is itself no small guarantee of victory, for it strengthens us to meet the frowns of the world and the negative feeling of our own weakness; and even if the fears that beset us remain in undiminished strength, we *know* that they will yet be vanquished.

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Suppose it could be shown that the "great Companion is dead," or as a distinguished man of science of an earlier generation imagined, that He is only the creation of our hopes and fears, that on this earth man is the only divinity there is—what a night of despair would fall upon millions of lonely and burdened hearts!

A modern psychologist once put to a number of persons this question:

"If you became thoroughly convinced that there was no God, would it make any great difference in your life?"

One reply was, "If I were convinced that there was no God, I fear a sense of loneliness would become intolerable."

"As for any responsibility or ability to face life and death with composure," wrote another correspondent, "any incentive to be perfect in things hidden from outsiders, any exhilaration in life to try to do my best—I could not conceive it without the idea of God."

Another writer described God as "the hidden strength of my strength and the

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stay of my weakness—some one to understand me, requiring, reproofing, but loving.”¹

These testimonies point to a typical human experience. The psychologist is right, therefore, when he says that the “religious consciousness values God chiefly as a companion. The need of Him is a social need. . . . The God consciousness, even in its superficial and conventional forms, is a defense against the feeling of utter loneliness and solitude that comes upon most of us at times.”²

We are alone, and yet we are not alone; around and about and within our loneliness is the companionship of God if we but open our hearts to receive it.

This is no expression of an overstrained spiritualism; on the contrary, it has been verified in the experience of men in every age, the mystics, the reformers, the seers and prophets, a Socrates, a Paul, a Luther, and a Lincoln, and myriads of lesser spirits

¹J. B. Pratt, *Psychology of Religious Belief*, pp. 266, 267.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 268, 269.

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who bear witness that to them, through communion with the Unseen, have come comfort, strength, and insight which no human fellowship could impart.

Though we ourselves as yet have had no direct and mystic contact with the Divine, let us at least believe it to be possible on the testimony of other souls. Then we, too, in due season, will know that God has broken silence to us.

We need divine companionship to enable us to bear the pains and griefs of life. We know how human companionship in suffering changes the quality of the suffering, so that what else were unendurable can be borne, and can even be made a matter of rejoicing.

Who has not experienced the healing, unifying, and strengthening power of sympathy, even though the sympathy is powerless to move by a hair's breadth the causes of the anguish?

"The grief which all hearts share grows less for one," said Buddha. Yet in all human consolation there is a defect. Be-

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tween the closest friends the barriers of the flesh intervene; a thousand imperfections give rise to misunderstanding and estrangement that often end in the bitterness of death. Not here can the heart find permanent comfort or an abiding triumph over the sharpness of pain. We need another and a greater Companion. We need an intimate and perfect Associate in whose unerring insight and unwearied love we can establish our happiness as on everlasting foundations.

There is a fruitful truth in the belief of all mystics that in some way, not to be conceived by us, God is afflicted in all the affliction of His children. We realize this in some small measure through our own experience of vicarious suffering. The innocent, we say, suffer for the guilty. We should rather say that they suffer with them. But this suffering, which seems to us so intolerable, so utterly irrational, is the most redeeming and cleansing force in history. Not a pang is fruitless of its due.

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Thus, to a certain extent, we can rise to the thought of God sharing with us our grief, and by this participation we are lifted above it into confidence and peace. Pain takes its place as only a transient element in a larger and abiding reality. Just as in the life of God it is always passing into joy, so in the life of the human soul its function is temporary and its goal supreme blessedness. Viewed from this standpoint, suffering ceases to be local or accidental; it takes on a cosmic, universal significance, and by the vision of this truth we are reconciled and at rest.

To know that God knows my pain, and in some sense feels it, is itself a relief. I am no longer in some lone desert, racked with a private distress, shut up to endure as best I can the agony which Nature, or man, or my own ignorance, inflicts upon me. I am in God's world, bound up in a bundle of life with One infinitely greater and stronger than I, and, therefore, Master of every evil that can befall.

This conviction robs pain of half its

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sting. It is this truth that Augustine expresses in his prayer: "Thou didst know that I was suffering, and no man knew. Thou findest pleasure in us and so regardest each of us as if Thou hadst him alone to care for."

There are many who, while acceding to what has just been said, are discouraged by the seeming unreality of the spiritual world, by the transcendent greatness of the universal Mind. They turn away as though such a God were too high for them, His abstractness and loftiness removing Him from warm and living contact with the soul. The idea of the Divine companionship does not find them; they cannot realize it.

Now, speaking broadly, man needs the help of a mediatorial spirit whom he recognizes to be perfectly loving and perfectly good. Through the contemplation of such a personality a sense of the unutterable reality of the Divine nature is born. For God's most majestic revelations shine forth in a soul consecrated to the ideal,

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expending itself in creative acts of self-sacrifice, possessed by the pure spirit of love.

Such a mediator is enshrined in the heart of the Christian religion. In Christ is portrayed, as nowhere else, all that the heart of man can conceive as most worthy of God. It is by fixing the attention on the historical image of Christ, by letting it work freely on heart and imagination, that we gain the conviction of a living and dynamic Love at the center of the universe.

We feel instinctively that no real catastrophe can overtake us in a world where God is present, that He can hear us when we pray, and that this thought is a more powerful defense and a more urgent incentive than all the pronouncements of the logical understanding.

Not by struggling and straining after an experience which baffles the most ardent pursuit, but by surrender to the mystic spell which Christ's personality forever exercises on the receptive spirit, do we

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enter into the secret of blessedness, the sense of fellowship with Him who, from one point of view, is our ideal Self, and yet from another, is greater than any self.

He is the ever-living Presence that brings serenity and peace amid life's tragic sorrows and disillusionments, and transfigures the last despairs of guilt and shame with the hope of reconciliation and victory.

IV

GOD AND REGENERATION

THEORIES about sin or moral evil are legion. We may leave them to the professional theologian. Here we are concerned with sin as an experience.

Whatever doctrine we may espouse or reject, subjective experience witnesses that within each one of us there is something wrong, some perversion, some maladjustment of our energies. If life is to move on to any worthy issue, a reconstruction of our nature is a crying necessity.

We come into this world with certain inborn predispositions, inherited from our ancestors. Before us stands a great Either-Or; *either* we must conquer these inherited tendencies, *or* be conquered by them. There is no escape from this

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choice—hence the weighty import of the words written five hundred years before Christ over the temple of Apollo at Delphi, “Know thyself.”

To the Greek mind this saying seemed the quintessence of wisdom. But, alas! the self which we are called upon to know is apparently inscrutable. Hunt for it as we may, it eludes us and is forever vanishing into a bottomless abyss of mystery.

Hence it happens that we fall victims, almost before we know it, to some weakness or defect; and gradually by force of repetition we are the slaves of a base master. The environment into which we come is one of mingled good and evil, and the evil without, meeting the hereditary disposition within, enters into a sinister alliance with it, which the will, even under the urge of an awakened conscience, is powerless to annul.

The curse of sin is not suffering. The Nemesis that overtakes the wrong-doer is not the pain which an inexorable law of the divine government attaches to the

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wrong. It is the increased capacity and aptitude for doing wrong.

That the sinner is able to feel the pains of an outraged conscience is a sign that he is still capable of better things. It is sin that dogs the heels of sin, and the worst penalty that the sinner can endure is his growing lack of susceptibility to the appeal of higher and nobler motives.

The "candle of the Lord" burning in every soul, if ignored or despised, burns more dimly, until at last the whole man is threatened with gloom and confusion. Despair must be our portion if there is no greater Light which endures though ours should fail. For it is the witness of human experience that man is not his own redeemer.

By a strange illusion men think that they can conquer the power of evil within them, reconcile conscience and will, and achieve their destiny by self-effort and self-culture. It is indeed true that without effort and discipline, serious and protracted, issuing in the formation of vir-

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tuous habits of will, self-realization is impossible; but it is also true that these powers of themselves, in the vast majority of instances, lead to despair born of a consciousness of defeat. Even the few select spirits in whom they have won a measure of success fall short of the highest heights of personality.

You counsel the poor victim of alcohol or other narcotics to become sober and temperate by forming habits of sobriety and temperance, by learning to say "No" to the seductions of his darling vice, by the ardent contemplation of the virtue of self-control.

Excellent advice—if only it would work—but the alcoholic might well turn upon you with a crushing retort: "You ask me to *begin* to be sober, that is to will what I know to be good, to choose the right and to reject the wrong. But how can I? I am a prisoner held fast in these chains which I myself have forged. If only I could make a beginning, a start on the upward way, I would have some hope of

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gaining the goal. If only my imagination and desire could be lifted from off the object that obsesses both and set upon the ideal whose attractions to me just now are pale and thin, then I could face the future with confidence and peace—but as it is, ‘Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?’”

What is true of the drunkard is also true of the miser, the sensualist, the gambler—in a word, of every man on whom an undesirable habit has fixed its grip. Deliverance is to come (so the victim feels) from the outside; yet no mere force compelling the surrender of the will can solve this problem. He is a responsible agent; he must himself choose. How is he to be rescued from this miserable dilemma?

If only some Power akin to his real self would enter in to strengthen what is spiritual and make it dominant over what is merely natural, to reconstruct and renew the whole psychic organism, then the man could step forth into freedom and realize

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in thought and action the highest potencies of his being.

Now such a Power is God. That man is made in the divine image is the fundamental presupposition not only of the Christian religion, but of all religions. In all stages of the religious consciousness there is a yearning for fellowship with the Godhead, and this implies belief that there are qualities in common to the Divine and the human.

This unity of God and man abides beneath the error, the degradation, and the shames that mar the native beauty of the human spirit. When the soul and God meet they meet not as strangers, but as beings drawn to each other by the forces of a hidden affinity, by an inner oneness of spiritual nature.

Thus it comes about that the regenerative process is not something imposed on the soul by an alien power; it is the joint work of the finite spirit linked to the infinite Spirit, in whom it lives, moves, and has its being.

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We can see to a very limited extent how the transformation comes about. The soul, in turning to God, returns to simplicity and unity. Ideas, impulses, emotions, are all gathered around the central Reality—the All-holy. The higher and more spiritual the conception of God is, the more effectively are all the powers of the soul organized and unified. Ancient inhibitions are swept away, fears are dissipated, obsessive desires lose their urgency and die out, peace takes the place of conflict, and the whole man is lifted out of weakness into strength, out of inadequacy and impracticality into a faith and a confidence that can remove mountains.

The soul, as it were, rehearses its history in the light of God's unerring judgment. It condemns and renounces whatever cannot stand this searching test, and it organizes its life afresh around a new and holy and vitalizing spiritual center.

But when we pass from the human to the divine side of the process, we are lost in mystery. *How* God affects the man,

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how we are to conceive His appearance in the causal series of mental phenomena so that new phenomena arise, we cannot explain any more than we can explain how certain sounds striking on the tympanum of the ear, and transmitted to a certain brain area, are suddenly translated into the splendors of a Mozart symphony or a Beethoven sonata.

We cannot, indeed, detect God at work. In the soul as in Nature He hides Himself; with infinite subtlety He molds us to His will. Some students of religious psychology, in order to explain how God can mingle with the inner life and remove the hindrances to harmony and peace, take refuge in the theory of the "subconscious" or the "unconscious."

God, they say, carries on His recreative activity in the underlying region of the mind; and thus, by a kind of concealed door, saving influences enter the conscious life and reveal themselves in new desires, new motives, and a new type of conduct.

This is simply the calling in of mystery

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to explain mystery. I find as great a difficulty in seeing how God can inject into the unconscious a thought or a new affection, as in seeing how He can work the same wonder in the sphere of the conscious. On the whole it seems better to say that just as one mind can suggest to another, consciously or subconsciously, and can influence that other in the liveliest way without trenching on the sacred rights of will and responsibility, so God can influence the entire personality in all the fullness of its conscious and subconscious experience without diminishing by an iota its creative freedom and sense of moral independence.

Our unbidden thoughts of good, our noblest impulses, the quick-shooting pangs of penitence, the tears that startle us in moments of self-reflection, the aspirations that rise unconquered from every defeat—whence come these high and moving experiences? Not certainly from ourselves, but from the direct and immediate touch of God upon us.

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Nor has psychology anything to say against this intuition; for whatever God does in our mental life must be in accordance with the forms and in obedience to the laws of this life. Otherwise, we could be no more conscious of His influence than we are of His energizing in some remote corner of the physical universe.

We may indeed explain away these inner voices as delusion or interpret them as the product of our natural surroundings and therefore bereft of all right to command the will—in which case we need not be surprised if they fail of their spiritual ministry and leave us duller and more insensitive than before. Their reality can be tested by their ethical fruits.

A religious teacher of modern America tells us that when he experienced the great change of his life he felt as though a wonderful love had flooded his soul, and then the reaction came. He doubted his own interpretation of the mystic event.

“Is this reality or is this illusion?” he

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asked himself. Is this experience from God, or is it morbid fancy?

He discovered in due time that he had made no mistake, and his discovery was verified by a life abundant in good works, in utter devotion to the highest interest of his fellow-men.¹

We are free to believe or disbelieve. Without the venture of faith we cannot enjoy the characteristic fruits of faith, for faith is the indispensable human condition to the divine work of regeneration. Faith is to religion what experiment is to science. We can know the transforming, miracle-working might of the Spirit through sympathy, through co-operation in word and act and character with His gracious promptings and suggestions.

¹ *Memoirs of Charles G. Finney Written by Himself*, pps. 22, 23.

V

GOD—PERSON OR PRINCIPLE?

THE underlying assumption of all religion, from its crudest beginnings to its most refined and spiritualized developments, is that in some real sense God is personal; that is, that in Him there are qualities and powers corresponding to the qualities and powers which we find in ourselves.

But this idea is challenged not only by the philosophical critic, but by the man in the street who is influenced by the confused metaphysic of popular quasi-pantheistic movements, such as Christian Science and New Thought.

To say that God is a personality (it is objected) is tantamount to saying that He is limited mentally and spiritually, and

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a limited God were as good as none. Yet if He is not a personality, how can we ever know Him or how can He ever know us?

In order to be a real God he must be like man, a living, concrete Person, yet also more than man, as the original is more and greater than the copy, as realized perfection is something other than imperfection.

This is the metaphysical puzzle which bewilders so many to-day. The mystic solves it by the sublime idea that God is love and, therefore, contains within Himself a sacrificial impulse, a capacity of self-limitation. In creating and redeeming His world He has set bounds to His dynamic energy, to the operations of His will, so that what appears to be a weakening of His supremacy from without is really a limit imposed upon it from within.

Whatever may be the difficulties in which the discursive understanding finds itself, we are here concerned with the necessities of life, which are always more

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fundamental than those of logic. We arrive at a conviction of the personality and moral attributes of God not by the removal of all difficulties, or by the ability to answer every objection, but because the reasons on the other side exceed in weight and value everything that can be alleged against them.

The primary question is, what kind of a God do we need in order to make life worth living, to give it as rich and as satisfying content as possible?

In a questionnaire recently sent out under the direction of the Psychical Research Society at the request of the writer, among the queries put was this:

“If you have ever engaged in prayer, to whom or to what were your prayers directed?”

Here are some of the answers:

“As a child I believed in a personal God; now I believe in the great moral Force for good.”

“To God, but later to some Force.”

“Formerly to a personal Deity, later

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to a supposed controlling Spirit of the universe."

"To an anthropomorphic God until the time when reason asserted itself; since then to some Force or Power, I know not what."

"To a Divine Creative Principle."

"To God, whom I regard beyond all personality and who has all power."

"I was taught to pray to God. But who is God, where is He? My prayers now go to the Source of all good."

"To an unseen Force and not a personal God."

Some reflections are suggested by the spiritual situation as disclosed in these testimonies. First of all, we are not here dealing with any so-called new thought, but rather with a more or less constant mental tendency.

Coleridge complained in his day of "an increasing unwillingness to contemplate the supreme Being in His personal attributes." He points out that "the young and ardent, ever too apt to mistake the

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inward triumph in the detection of error for a positive love of truth, are among the first and most frequent victims to this epidemic *fastidium*. Alas! even the sincerest seekers after light are not safe from the contagion.

“Some have I known, constitutionally religious—I speak feelingly, for I speak of that which for a brief period was my own state—who under this unhealthful influence have been so estranged from the heavenly *Father*, the *Living God*, as even to shrink from the personal pronouns as applied to the Deity.

“But many do I know, and yearly meet with, in whom a false and sickly *Taste* co-operates with the prevailing fashion: many, who find the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob far too real, too substantial, who feel it more in harmony with their indefinite sensations

“To worship Nature in the hill and valley,

Not knowing what they love—

and (to use the language, but not the sense or purpose of the Great Poet of our

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Age) would fain substitute for the Jehovah of their Bible

“A sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the Light of setting suns,
And the round Ocean and the Living Air;
A Motion and a Spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

And this from having been educated to understand the Divine Omnipresence in any sense rather than the sole safe and legitimate one, the presence of all things to God!”¹

One cannot help feeling that popular preaching and writing, by its over-emphasis on the realistic language of the Bible, as though God were a “magnified and non-natural man,” has tended to work a reaction in the ordinary mind in favor of what seems a worthier and a grander conception.

The pulpit as a rule assumes belief in the Christian idea of God, and that this

¹*Aids to Reflection* (Conclusion Sect. 16).

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idea is generally known and understood. Hence the curious phenomenon that only on the rarest occasions does one hear a discourse after the manner of the older divines about God, His nature or His attributes.

Some of the correspondents whose words have been quoted are members of Christian Churches and above the average in intelligence; yet confusion and misunderstanding about the primary postulate of all religion are only too evident.

It appears to be very difficult, if not impossible, for the non-speculative mind to avoid carrying over to the idea of the Divine personality, the finitude and arbitrariness, the weakness and imperfection, which are elements in the ideas of human personality. Hence many have abandoned, or imagined that they have abandoned, belief in God as personal and have betaken themselves to faith in an omnipresent impersonal "Law" or "Principle," acting with the inevitableness and uniformity of gravitation or chemical affinity.

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Still further it is to be noted that many persons have found in their changed view of God a peace and a comfort which had been denied them under the influence of traditional religion.

As a recent writer has put it, "they have been accustomed to worship God as though He were an individual man—of superhuman powers, it is true, but still an individual, with all the individual's liability to limitation, to waywardness, to forgetfulness and caprice. Even the most loving man may sometimes fail in loving, but Love itself can never fall short of loving. The worst rules may sometimes grow slack, and his wisdom may fail to interpret itself to our moods. Our folly may annoy or infuriate him; but Wisdom will never forget to be wise, and Goodness will never be impatient, and Love can never see death."

Teaching of this order bears witness to aspects of truth that have been neglected in the Church's ministry. And yet it is itself one-sided and, if taken as it stands,

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misleading and inadequate. As a matter of fact, however, its power to injure is nullified by the subconscious force of teaching which, however imperfect, at least bears witness to a still more important truth.

Apart from the obvious consideration that "Goodness," "Wisdom," and "Principle," and all such abstractions are impersonal and have no value or meaning whatever except as revealed in and through personal life, it must be insisted that since the demand of religion is for fellowship with God, for a mutual give-and-take, each partner in the covenant must be able to say "I" and "thou."

Apply the idea of the supposed superiority of the notion of a "Principle" to the act of prayer. Can we pray to a principle? We can meditate on an impersonality, or try to bring our life into conformity with it, but in no intelligible sense can we pray to it.

Now a God to whom we cannot pray, to all intents and purposes, is no God at all.

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Hence it follows that in the interests of the ethical and spiritual life a personal God is a necessity.

If it is objected that a personal God is an anthropomorphic Deity, the utmost conceivable enlargement of what we find in ourselves, then we must reply that the word "anthropomorphism" ought not to be allowed to frighten us away from the endeavor to thread a path through the mysteries of experience. The truth is that if we are to think of God at all, we must think of Him in terms of our own being; we cannot get outside of ourselves to gain a view more on a level with the transcendent Object of our thought.

But what we must earnestly attend to is that our interpretation of God shall be in terms of what is really the highest and greatest within us, not in terms of something which because of its abstractness seems larger and more comprehensive, but is in reality thinner and less adequate.

Steadfastness, law, principle, wisdom—these things can fall within the category

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of personality; but personality cannot be brought within the confines of any or all of them.

“I see,” says Professor Hocking, “that personality is a stronger idea than law and has promise of mutuality and increase that laws, even if living, cannot afford. I see, further, that personality can include law, as law cannot include personality; and I see finally that this deepening conception of personality is no more an ideal than an experience. For God is not falsely judged in experience to be both the one and the other.”¹

A personal idea of God, therefore, is richer, has more spiritual content, and meets better the demands of the spiritual life than any non-personal concept. Whatever else God may or may not be, if He is God at all, He must be living, dynamic, able to do things; and such capacities are the prerogatives only of a personal being.

It is true that personality as applied to

¹*The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, pp. 335, 336.

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God is at best a symbol of some higher and for us inexpressible reality. But then it is the highest symbol that we can conceive.

As Matthew Arnold says, "our highest words are simply thrown out at an object of consciousness not fully grasped." Not by surrendering the notion of personality, but by enlarging and purifying it, shall we be the gainers. Whatever is narrow or changeable, or arbitrary about the notion of personality should be dissolved away in the vision of universal forces that are operative in the smallest as in the greatest things of earth.

All that is gained by emphasis on the majestic order, the all-encompassing grandeur, and the unchanging uniformity of the power or force revealed in the universe is conserved with much else equally necessary for an adequate idea of God, if we hold fast by the profound paradox that the Eternal is at once like and unlike to us.

Religion oscillates between these two

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poles, but the full-orbed reality must find room for both. Emphasize exclusively the unlikeness, and a yawning chasm is created between the divine and the human. Overwork the notion of likeness, and you imperil the transcendent dignity and glory of the Divine.

Conserve the likeness and the unlikeness, and then there can be cherished at once a profound sense of our own spiritual dignity and inherent greatness (since what is best in us is our fittest symbol of God because like Him); and also an equally profound sense of our weakness and imperfection and sin, since these experiences have nothing corresponding to them in His character.

VI

CHRIST'S IDEA OF GOD

ONE of the great difficulties which beset many minds when they would think of God is the vagueness and indefiniteness of what is meant by the word.

"What a dim shadow," says Frederick Denison Maurice, "thrown, it would seem, from our own minds, has often been before us when we were kneeling to the Majesty of heaven! What a strong self-congratulation that we were performing an act of worship, good and desirable to *some* Being; but to *what Being* we hardly dared to ask ourselves!"¹

Some seek relief from this vacuity of thought by turning to the physical universe, in the hope of finding there an

¹*The Lord's Prayer*, p. 289.

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image of the Divine on which they can rest. In certain moods they read with pleasure the poetry of Wordsworth, who lived the life of a recluse amid the peaceful dales of his native land, and who makes Nature so gentle, so spiritual, so friendly to man and to his interests.

But science tells us a very different story. We know that Nature is not always gentle, that she is "red in tooth and claw," and that her ways are often terrible and cruel, as though she were making sport of the spirits of men, kindling, and extinguishing them in remorseless jest.¹

Go where you will throughout all space, and you will find nothing but matter and force in a state of constant evolution according to some vast and, by us, inconceivable plan. When we tear aside the veils woven by the magic of the poet's fancy, Nature discloses only indefinitely great power and intelligence; but power

¹Compare the remark of Coleridge that "the world so far from being a goddess in petticoats is rather the Devil in a straight waistcoat."—*Works*, vol. vi., p. 300 (Harper's Ed.).

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and intelligence, however great, have nothing moral or spiritual in them. They are merely the instruments which character uses for the achievement of its ends.

What we crave to know is, what kind of a spirit is it that energizes throughout all space? What is the nature of the Will from which these mighty forces eternally proceed?

To this question Nature gives no certain sound. She speaks, indeed, but her tones are muffled and her words are enigmatic. Her laws work on indefinitely, crushing alike the sinner and the saint, and the mystery which everywhere is evident seems to say, "Not in me is the answer that you seek." If Nature reveals God, as Pascal says, she also conceals Him. Through Nature the soul must pass in order to find God.

There's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;
No suns and moons, though ere so bright,
Avail to stop me; splendour-proof,
I keep the brood of stars aloof,
For I intend to get to God.¹

¹Browning, *Johannes Agricola in Meditation*.

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The great truth which to-day is finding new emphasis is that we reach God not by His lower but by His highest manifestations. Now, personality is the highest thing in our experience. If here we can find no open door leading into the immediate presence of the Divine, we are shut out in a world given over to blind unconscious forces.

Thus it is by returning from the outer to the inner reaches of experience that we gain a knowledge what is the highest attainable by us, and which suffices for the practical purposes of life.

It follows that the higher and the more spiritual the personality is, the more adequate will be the revelation of God which it mediates.

To-day most men admit that among the creative personalities of history Jesus stands supreme, manifesting as He does the finest humanity, a soul perfectly unified by boundless love to God and to man.

We turn from Nature, from the broken lights of our own spirits, to the words and

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deeds of this Man whose message is timeless, and demands fresh interpretation at the hands of each generation.

Christ did not create the idea of God. Long before His day the God-consciousness had been in possession of the race.

Greek thought and Hindu wisdom and Jewish prophecy had scaled dizzy heights of inspiration and intuition, and to these sources we still return when we would feel the greatness, the majesty, the unutterable reality of the universal Spirit.

But it was the unique achievement of Christ to find in God a new and unrealized Power in life, somewhat as in our own day the ministers of science have discovered in the mysterious forces of the physical universe great practical agencies in the development of civilization.

Christ unveils the God of whom men had prophesied and about whose ways they had argued, and He unveils Him in a new and entrancing light. From the distant heavens He comes down to our familiar earth, and is disclosed as a Power

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that raises life to its highest potential, that enhances personality, and gives man the victory over himself and the world.

He is the invading Life which lifts our souls into a clear and unimpassioned atmosphere, sets free our psychic powers, and awakens all our dormant possibilities. It is only the barest truth to say that since Christ, God has become a new Being to the human soul.

The name by which He most loved to call God is the name "Father." Jewish scholars tell us that in using this word Jesus was simply echoing what He found in the Old Testament and in the traditional prayers of the synagogue.

It is true that the word "Father" as a name for God goes back to the Old Testament and much farther, even to the earliest beginnings of conscious religion.

Jesus makes no pretensions to create a new spiritual vocabulary; His achievement is far greater. He fills the old words with new meaning, and too often Christian thinking has failed to rise to the

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height of His prophetic word, for it is no exaggeration to say that His new conception of God marks a revolution in the thoughts of men. In calling God "Father" He proclaims love to be the central determining quality of God's being.

It is not that love is an attribute of God's character; rather is it of His essence and inmost life. In other words, Fatherhood is love, original and underived, communicating itself freely to all human souls, not to the good only, but to the unlovely and the bad.

A New Testament writer who had drunk deeply of the spirit of the Master sums up the revelation in words that are at once simple and inexhaustible, "God is Love." Men have obscured the glory of this revelation by theories and doctrines of their own making, from a desire to explain, or vindicate, or safeguard from dangerous inferences this glorious utterance. But after all, the greatest things are the simplest, and the relation between the infinite Soul

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and all finite souls is so simple that many are unable to believe it.

Yet the more we think of this revelation, the more it commends itself to us as most worthy of what God should be; so much so, indeed, that to-day the only possible alternatives for thinking men is either belief in the God whom Christ proclaimed and realized in His life, or no God at all. This is the most wonderful thing in the slow unfolding of the soul's history. Better no God than a God less or other than the God of Jesus.

Jesus found the word "Father" in the religion of His day, but He discovered what the word meant in the depths of His own soul. Such a thought of God could only have sprung out of a nature absolutely pure, perfectly loving. All other men, even the greatest of the prophets, had dimmed their vision of God by the shadows of their own inner world; but no shadow rested on the glory of God as it broke on the perfect soul of Christ.

The greatness and the limitation of the

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older revelation come out in a phrase which must have been familiar to the Master:

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth *them that fear Him*.”¹

The glory of the new word is that the Lord pities them that do *not* fear Him with a pity that is always drawing them to repentance.

When we say that “God is Love” we say something so great and so elemental that all attempts at definition are futile and superfluous.

“What do we know of love, except that it is the force at once active and passive, by which all things attract one another, by which each thing is drawn out of itself into oneness with other things, by which all things are drawn out of themselves into oneness first with one another and then with a living Whole?”

Or, to translate these abstract terms into a form more personal, we may say that love at its highest range implies a desire

¹ Psalm ciii: 12.

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for fellowship with the being loved, springing out of a devotion to this being's welfare.

In all the highest love there is the joy of self-renunciation, of self-surrender. In giving itself love receives, in sacrifice love gains. It is love in this sense, in its highest form, that constitutes the inner life of God. Out of this eternal fountain-head flows all that is truly called love among men.

The gods which the ancients conceived were selfish, even though their selfishness was often subtly disguised. The God of Jesus Christ is a God of love, who is eternally giving Himself in all the fullness of His being in order that those to whom He gives may give in return, and find, in giving, unsearchable wealth.

Thus love becomes the end that is common to both God and man.

In the light of this great idea much traditional teaching appears inadequate and even false. For one thing, we can no longer suppose God to be the author

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of the suffering and evil of the world, or accept the popular idea still cherished in many religious circles that war, disease, suffering, mental or physical, comes from God either as a punishment for a definite sin or as a chastisement to make good men better.

As a matter of fact, the greater portion of physical evil springs from human ignorance and violation of law, moral and physiological. To attribute physical and mental distresses to God, as the product of His will, is to involve His character in grave misunderstanding and to cast a blot upon His government.

It is one thing to say that God can and does overrule the pain and suffering in the world for the good of the sufferer and for that of others; it is another and a very different thing to say that God deliberately sends the distress as though in itself it were a good and automatically worked good in the sufferer.

Suffering and trial can be transmuted into a means of purification and strength

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through the presence of love in the heart. It is a profound remark of George Meredith that "there is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by." But whether we reap the profit depends on our attitude to the suffering.

In an ideal world, a world corresponding to the Divine intention, there would be no pain, or if there were, the "feeling-tone" associated with it here and now would be unknown. The idea that God could be the creator of the ills that plague human flesh would never have survived had men from the beginning realized the significance of Christ's healing ministry; for the presupposition of that ministry is that sickness is a part of the complex of evil which it was His mission to destroy.

When He went about doing good, lifting the burden of disease from the bodies and souls of men and women, He was simply revealing the attitude of the All-Father to the pain and misery of His children. Were it otherwise, and did God

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send these evils for whatever reason, then a great part of Christ's work was both useless and out of keeping with the Divine plan.

So, too, with human sin, the other great element in the kingdom of evil. Christ bears the wrongs the world inflicts upon Him; He allows the waves of human cruelty and wrong to sweep over Him; He endures the agony of the cross; He accepts in uttermost self-surrender the worst that fate can do; and in all this He is simply revealing in time the passion of the Eternal in the redemption of humanity.

The combined powers of the world's evil were unable to break Christ's will to love, and this very will reveals the nature of God, to whom our sin is pain because He is Love and out of His love seeks our well-being.

It is true that we have here a faith, not a reasoned demonstration. We cannot even imagine a solution of the problem of evil. But the message of Christ which

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appeals primarily not to man the thinker, but to man the fighter in the battle of life, the hero of a moral struggle, gives promise of an ultimate reconciliation, and meantime sustains and heartens him amid the woes and disasters of time.

VII

CONVERSATION WITH GOD

THE student of religious history is struck by the singular fact that the difficulties and problems which sorely tried the faith of one generation hardly exist for the men of a subsequent age.

It is not that direct and satisfying solutions have always been found; it is rather that the problems are now viewed in the light of a wider and more satisfying outlook. With the rise of science in the nineteenth century prayer as a rational act was considered to be difficult, if not impossible, to defend.

Even the advocates of prayer, who had accepted the conclusions of science, surrendered at the same time the whole

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realm of nature to the rule of rigid, inviolable law, while reserving the inner world of thought and emotion as the sphere in which God and the soul might meet in real fellowship.

“The two very men,” says Dr. W. Herrman, “who have shown the richest pictures of the Christian life in their sermons, Schleiermacher and F. W. Robertson (and we may add Martineau), have never been able to overcome the thought that the subjection to law of all things that are real to the senses and the inner endlessness that the smallest event has, owing to its dependence on all other events, render it impossible that the progress of the world should be changed; because man will not submit to the fate that has woven out of the conditions of the present state of the world. In the sermons of these great men we find some of the deepest words ever spoken on the subject of prayer. But that which they have to say about the efficiency of prayer shows how hard it has become for faith to main-

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tain itself untroubled in the spiritual situation developed by the rise of science.”¹

The view of prayer which was held by spiritual thinkers in the last century implies that God is the energizing Spirit of our inner life, while our outer is the unchangeable result of natural conditions. Modern theology rightly rejects such a dualism.

The end of all prayer is to draw near to God to find in Him our life and our strength. This is real prayer as distinguished from counterfeits, which are simply tense and burning desires of an earthly order.

In this real prayer there is a power which can shape the future of men and of the world. In answer to such prayer our energies are renewed, and we cease to be weak, despondent victims of this or that external force; psychic energies are released within us; the powers of personality are enhanced.

This means that the external situation which comes between us and God is al-

¹Art. "Gebet" in Herzog's *Real Encyc.*

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tered, or that we have now strength to triumph over it and to make it subserve our longing desire for closer fellowship with God. How God does this we are unable to understand; no more are we able to understand how He can create the world and so limit Himself. But in neither the one case nor the other does the fact that we cannot understand the process disprove the reality of the thing itself.

Prayer is at once something beyond us, and something which we can experience; so far as it is something that we experience, it can be analyzed; so far as it is transcendent, we cannot conceive it.

Modern psychology is doing a great and useful work in showing how the subconscious factor enters into the prayer-experience, and how prayers spring out of deep inner necessities of nature. The barriers between the subjective and the objective worlds are melting away, and we are beginning to see that prayer is concerned not with this or that aspect of reality, but with reality as a whole.

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The late Mr. F. W. H. Myers, viewing the matter from a purely psychological point of view, says that "prayer is not indeed a purely subjective thing. It means a real increase in intensity of absorption of spiritual power or grace—but we do not know enough of what takes place in the spiritual world to know how the prayer operates."

To-day we are all pragmatists; doctrines and beliefs find their verification in practical tests. But pragmatic judgments must be confined to the ethical and spiritual spheres. There is no place for them in the scientific region. If this were remembered, much futile criticism would be avoided.

The law of gravitation, or the chemical constitution of matter, lies wholly outside pragmatic theory. This theory rests on the conviction that ultimately the good and the true will be found to be one. When the pragmatist test is applied to prayer we know the answer that is given.

It is because of the practical benefits of

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prayer that men of the most diverse schools of thought—psychologists, moralists, humanists—invite us to practise this spiritual exercise.

Emerson feels that prayer, even to mental abstractions, has a purifying and transforming influence on him who prays. Witness his great aspiration, which is a kind of noble self-suggestion:

“I love the Right; Trust is beautiful within and without for evermore; Virtue, I am thine; save me; use me; thee will I serve day and night, in great, in small, that I may be not virtuous, but Virtue.”

A well-known educator, who has done much for the practical scientific training of American youth, holds that even the man who conceives of God not as the Father in heaven, but as an impersonal energy permeating and upholding the universe, must pray, else he will lose something of the greatest value out of his life.

“All serious men,” he says, “whatever their intellectual training is, must pray,

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not perhaps for material help, not in expectation that the laws of the universe shall be changed at their request, not even primarily for strength to live rightly and justly, but as the supreme effort of the human soul to know God.”¹

William James sees in prayer a source of freedom and enlargement of power. He tells us that our lives would be freer and abler if only we could disregard the critical atmosphere in which we have been reared and let ourselves go in prayer.

What is, however, specially worth noting is that, by all who take an idealistic view of the world, prayer in some sense is now regarded as indispensable to the integrity and development of the spiritual life. This is still further confirmed by the tendency of certain groups which, unable to accept prayer as it is traditionally understood, substitute for it meditation or acts of self-dedication.

Who will deny that in communion with their higher selves these persons may not

¹*What is Religion?* by H. S. Pritchett, p. 93.

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also reach the God and Father whom Jesus Christ proclaimed and to whom He prayed?

When we turn to organized Christianity we find that on its side many of the objections to prayer which thoughtful men could not but feel, have been removed. Prayer has been undergoing a process of spiritualization. We no longer regard God, who is the true End of all things, as a means to an end, an instrument for the accomplishment of some earthly wish. Nor do we believe that sincere and reverent prayer will work for a violation of the regularities of the physical universe; for these regularities are themselves the revelation of the divine will.

Prayer is not the moving of God's will by ours, but the bringing of our soul into such a relation to God's that the good which He stands ready to give may find a channel through which it may pour itself into the soul.

We no longer pray for fine weather, for now we know what was not known to the

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men of an earlier time, that climatic changes are governed by laws as immutable as those which rule the procession of the stars or the chemical affinity of atoms.

Still further, instructed Christians now recognize that prayer, like every other act of the human spirit, moves within the bounds of order, is governed by certain laws or principles, obedience to which gains the blessing.

Prayer is not the capricious submission of a Power to the equally capricious egotism of favorites; all irrationality, all arbitrariness, is excluded. No man can pray sincerely, with utter abandonment to the highest revelation of the divine will vouchsafed him, without receiving an answer in harmony with his character and in proportion to the sincerity and intensity of his prayer. But no man has the right to expect an answer who refuses to accept the conditions, spiritual and psychological, by which prayer is made effective.

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What are some of these conditions? We will best learn them by a study of the words of the great mystics and masters of prayer, beginning with the Lord Jesus himself.

“Prayer is an art,” says Martin Luther.

If so we must, in order to become proficient in the art, go to school with the great creative geniuses in this realm. It is here that there remains to be cultivated a fruitful field in the experimental method. What we need is a formulation of the spiritual laws in accordance with which prayer wins its highest momentum and achieves its best results.

For example, prayer should pay attention to the varying moods of the soul. There are times in the lives of all of us when the wheels of life move slowly, when we are tired and nerveless, sick in body or mind; when the power of attention is diminished and we simply cannot fix our minds on matters about which we would pray.

Are we on that account to refrain from

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speaking to God? On the contrary, it is then that we need God in a special degree. We will do well, therefore, to relax the muscles, to fill the mind with a sense of the divine reality, and to open the heart to the inflow of divine love.

It is this practice of the presence of God that leads to inward rest, to a sense of satisfaction and relief which contributes to the right functioning of mind and body.

Or again, we may find ourselves absorbed in necessary and important work; only a brief time for prayer is possible. Yet these hurried moments, if used well, will give a heightened sense of power and fitness for the labor in hand. In all great men of prayer we find this double phenomenon; absorption in the given work and in the machinery by which it is achieved, and at the same time hunger for direct communion with reality, for face-to-face intercourse with God, from whom they draw life and peace and poise.

In St. Paul, in Francis of Assisi, in Catherine of Genoa, in Luther, in General Gor-

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don, we have at once great workers and great pray-ers.

We cannot all be masters in the spiritual life, but we can all be more spiritual than we are, and we can all pray, even in the short time the world allows us, to much better purpose than we do. It is here that the inadequacy of such a philosophy as Eucken's is disclosed.

This distinguished thinker is strong while he emphasizes the moral significance of man as a worker, a creature who achieves wonders by the sheer force of his will, who makes history possible because he refuses to remain subject to his purely natural impulses, and who identifies himself with the cosmic spiritual life; but Eucken is weak in that he ignores man's need for the expression of his dependence on the spiritual life, for direct, personal, and individual contact with God.

Personality does not grow by work alone. It needs cessation from work and mystic communion with Him who is the Life of all life.

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Account for it as we may, the fact cannot be gainsaid that the serious and systematic use of prayer gives a force and an attractiveness to persons of little or no mental distinction which are not to be found among many prayerless men of intellect.

In other words, these persons may not be great thinkers, but they become great personalities. They are lifted out of the realm of the commonplace; they are to be reckoned among the heroes and heroines of history. In some hour of special trial, when the soul is searched as by fire, they rise in triumph and meet in quietness and confidence the worst that fate can do.

We can see how this must be so if we remember that prayer is a school of discipline for character. Without self-reflection and self-knowledge the soul cannot grow in strength and freedom, but self-reflection and self-knowledge are the very things which prayer bestows.

Says Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "An hour of solitude passed in sincere and ear-

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nest prayer, or the conflict with and conquest over a single passion or subtle bosom sin, will teach us more of thought, will more effectually awaken the faculty and form the habit of reflection, than an hour's study in the schools without them."¹

It is prayer that gives us not only actual, but also latent energy. What distinguishes one man from another is the consciousness which he reveals of reserve power. The man who has this consciousness fears no task, shrinks from no burden, despairs of no problem, and by the contagion of his strength nerves other souls to achievements that seemed impossible.

If prayer is, in essence, conversation with God, it follows that not only do we speak to God, but He speaks to us. Unhappily, our tendency is to make prayer one-sided, as if it were a monologue and not as it really is, a dialogue.

We will do well, then, to heed the advice of the mystic who tells us to enter at times

¹*Aids to Reflection*, Aphorism XI.

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into silence that we may hear the voice of the Other. That voice speaks through the higher self. Its word is:

“This is the way, walk thou in it.”

A noble impulse seizes us to fulfil a hard duty, or to make confession of some hidden guilt, or to crucify a loved ambition, or to renounce a friendship that threatens our soul's life. If we surrender to the impulse our prayer is answered, and God becomes more real to us, and speech with Him becomes one of the great organic necessities of our existence.

VIII

CAN A "FINITE GOD" SATISFY?

IN the most popular novel of the war, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, the hero is depicted as being forced by the pressure of a great spiritual crisis to this conclusion: "Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God, and been found by God, he begins at no beginning and works to no end."

In other words, belief in God is essential to man's spiritual and intellectual integrity. In a later book, *God the Invisible King*, Mr. Wells, throwing aside all disguise, openly grapples with the problem of God.

The book is sincere, at times penetrating and illuminating, and is the product of deep spiritual questionings. Though he

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writes with caustic power in criticism of organized Christianity, and threshes a good deal of old straw in belaboring the absurdities of a medieval theology, nevertheless much that he has to say is an echo of the higher teaching of Christian divines who are alive to the vital issues of the hour.¹

As illustrating this latter fact take these words about prayer: "Let there be no mistake about one thing, here prayer is a power; here God can indeed work miracles. A man with the light of God in his heart can defeat vicious habits, rise again combative and undaunted after a hundred falls, escape from the grip of lusts and revenges, make head against despair, thrust back the very onset of madness."²

Or these words about religion as a shaping force in the political realm.

¹It is unfortunate that Mr. Wells has allowed himself to use words of ridicule and contempt about the sincere attempts of Christian thinkers to solve the problem of God. He forgets that his own solution might be made the subject of a most humorous satire at the hand of any clever witling.

² P. 155.

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"The new conceptions do not tolerate either kings or aristocracies or democracies. Its implicit command to all its adherents is to make plain the way to the real theocracy. Its rule of life is to discover the service and will of God which towers in the hearts of men, and the performance of that will, not only in the private life of the believer, but in the acts and order of the state and nation of which he is a part. I give myself to God not only because I am so and so, but because I am mankind. I become in a measure responsible for every wrong in the world and man, I become a knight in God's service, I become my brother's keeper, I take sides against injustice, disorder, and against those temporal kings, emperors, princes, landlords, and owners who set themselves up against God's rule and worship."¹

These thoughts find an echo in the mind of any man touched by the humanitarian spirit of our time.

¹P. 97.

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But we are here concerned with his answer to the question, "Who or what is God?"

This answer may be described as a working out in a splendid imaginative prose of William James's suggestion of a "finite Deity."

He starts by assuming a dual God. There is the ultimate mystery behind time and space, a "Veiled Being which seems to know nothing of life or death, good or evil," who is the Unknown, perhaps also Unknowable. But it matters not, for there is another God with whom alone we are concerned.

This God is not the creator of the world, nor is He the Providence that rules in history, nor does He exercise any cosmical control. He is the God of the heart, finite and struggling, ever seeking to reach higher levels. He comes we know not whence; all we know is that He has a beginning, but no end. His presence is reflected in man and through man. As regards His nature He is a single spirit, a

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single person. He has motives, characteristics, and an aim.

"He is boundless life, boundless courage, boundless generosity." In a word He is a vastly magnified man, the embodiment of all that wins our homage.

Mr. Wells emphasizes especially one characteristic:

"The God of the new religion is a Fighter *par excellence*."¹ We may pity and love Christ, as we think of how He suffered, but we cannot worship Him. We can worship only the God who is courage. He does not submit to death, but fights against it, and in union with Him we too, fight as His soldiers. Our relation to this God, however, ends at death. He lives on, but we perish. Nevertheless, whether we die to-morrow or live forever, we are to identify ourselves with God, for in this identification lies our salvation.

Now, it must be confessed, this is a most alluring and seductive doctrine. The problem of evil, physical and moral, of

¹P. 97.

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error and imperfection, of the lapse of reality into appearance, of accident, disease and death—these are simply annulled by being made elements of an environment against which God reacts.

As to the origin and meaning of these phenomena we know nothing. They are simply parts of the scene on which God makes His appearance. He is their relentless antagonist; and so far as we are united to Him we, too, antagonize them, and in us and through us He overcomes them.

Still further: it cancels difficulties that arise out of the attributes which traditional religion ascribes to God. "God is omnipotent," you say. Then how do you make human history intelligible? For if He knows the future infallibly, man's freedom is an illusion. Nor does His omnipotence fare any better. For how can you reconcile the tragic sorrows of the world with His power to make an end of them, and at the same time conserve His moral character?

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These and other metaphysical puzzles Mr. Wells solves, or rather relegates to the limbo of the unknown, by his theory of a non-creative, non-omnipotent and non-omniscient God. Finally, it makes room for man to act and live as from himself. The task which has taxed the wits of philosophers in all ages has been how to find room in the same world for both God and man.

To one type of mind the majesty and sweep of the Divine Will is so overpowering that man becomes a thing of naught, a creature without rights or dignity, lying on his face in the dust in humiliation and self-contempt. To another type of mind—and Mr. Wells admits that he is temperamentally of this order—man has native prerogatives and powers and is summoned by God to become His ally in attacking evil and in building up the kingdom of the good. This message is bound to find acceptance in a world whose watchwords are Humanity, Progress, and Efficiency.

The question at stake is not whether

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religion can exist under this or that form of theistic belief (for religious experience has its own way of reconciling speculative contradictions), but it is as to which form best satisfies the religious consciousness at its highest.

I venture to maintain that the teaching of Mr. Wells fails to satisfy the demands of the religious life in at least four particulars.

(1) The religious life demands a God who is final and inevitable. It cannot be satisfied with simply a secondary Deity, however great and militantly vigorous He may be. The danger is always at hand of His being overshadowed by the mysterious "Veiled Figure" even as Fate in Greek religion eclipsed the whole Pantheon of minor divinities.

The mind seeks for finality, for the abiding amid all changes, for the ultimate beyond which it cannot go. I cannot trust myself to anything less than the Love that brought me into being, that patiently worked through countless ages to form a physical organism through which I might

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find self-expression and that at death will not absorb me into impersonality and darkness, but will spend other countless ages, if need be, in order that I may become partaker of His nature.

Still further: I live in a world of realities which I influence and which influence me. In and through them I become conscious of a Reality of realities; this Reality I call God.

(2) The religious life demands a guarantee of the victory of goodness. Does a finite God afford such assurance? Faith looks out upon life with its mingled good and ill and says, "I am not afraid; I know that goodness will yet win the day in every heart, and sometime and somehow the weakest and most sinful will rise into strength and holiness."

Whence springs this unconquerable optimism? Only because we conceive of God as the ultimate Ground of every spirit, and believe that however many possibilities of disaster lie open, they still are fixed and finite in number.

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As Martineau says, "An infinite Mind . . . is lifted above all surprise or disappointment, yet lives amid the free play of variable character and contingent history. Is this a limitation of God's foresight that He cannot read volitions that are yet to be? Yes, but it is a *self-limitation*."¹ We need a God about whom we can be sure that there are no hostile energies in the universe strong enough to defeat His purpose.

(3) The religious life demands a God who is so related to us that He can know our inmost thoughts and failings without creating any consciousness of injurious or wrongful invasion of our personality.

The difference between the everlasting Spirit of psalmist and prophet and the finite God of modern realism is one not of degree only, but of kind. Any intrusion into the chamber of our inner life without our consent or knowledge by any being, human or superhuman, who yet is not the ultimate Ground of all spiritual existence,

¹Quoted by James Ward. *The Realm of Ends*, p. 316.

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would be felt to be an outrage on our most sacred rights.

It is ours indeed to open the door of the soul to another and invite him to share our most secret experiences, but we should deem it intolerable that another should have the power to read thought and motive without our acquiescence. Yet it is this very knowledge that we gladly attribute to God, "O Lord Thou hast searched me and known me, Thou understandest my thoughts afar off, and art acquainted with all my ways."¹

Solemn and awe-inspiring thought! Yet the poet is conscious of no violation of the sanctities of his personal life. On the contrary, as though there were some subtle bond between him and the Searcher of hearts which no sin or weakness can dissolve, he boldly and confidently throws out the challenge: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me."

¹ Psalm cxxxix, 1, 2.

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But how is such an experience possible? Surely only in virtue of the intuition that God is not a finite person, but One in whom all men live and move and have their being and to whom they are so organically related that the awakened soul can say: "It is not I that live, it is God that liveth in me."

The fatal weakness of Mr. Wells's thinking about God is that it is too narrow, too external, ignoring as it does the mighty stream of thought represented by Plotinus, Spinoza, Hegel, and the great army of the mystics of all times.

We feel that this finite God is too thin and meager to be in harmony with the universe as we know it. Such a God must be unspeakably rich in His being, a unity which yet is complex, manifold, organic, and whose richness is shadowed forth in one measure in the flower that peeps from the crannied wall and in another measure in the self-conscious personality of man.

(4) The religious life demands a God within whose nature suffering finds a

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place. It is here that Mr. Wells has been misled by the traditional portrait of Jesus, the figure of the Crucified, "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." "God is courage," he says, "God is courage beyond any conceivable suffering. Christ is a Saint of non-resistance. We of the new faith repudiate the teaching of non-resistance. We are the militant followers of and participators in a militant God."

Over against these words I venture to place the judgment of a young Christian scholar who has studied the Gospels more deeply than most men of our time.

"The heroic recedes from our modern world view, our Christianity, and our conception of the person of Jesus. Wherefore men have humanized and humbled Him. Renan has stripped off His halo and reduced Him to a sentimental figure; coward spirits like Schopenhauer have dared to appeal to Him for their enervating philosophy, and our generation has modernized Him with the notion that it could comprehend His character and develop-

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ment psychologically. We must go back to the point where we can feel again the heroic in Jesus. Before that mysterious Person who in the form of His time knew that He was creating upon the foundation of His life and death a moral world which bears His name, we must lay our faces in the dust without daring even to wish to understand His nature. Only then can the heroic in our Christianity and in our world view be again revived.”¹

Wherein lay the heroism of Jesus?

Was it not in refusing the aid of material weapons, in boldly throwing Himself upon the inspirations of His own lofty soul and upon the undying instincts of humanity?

Was it not in turning aside from the easy road of popularity and success which He could have trodden in His loved Galilee and in setting His face toward Jerusalem where He knew a tragic fate awaited Him?

If He was simply a “being of extreme gentleness and delicacy,” a sweet Galilean

¹ Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (Eng. Trans.), pp. 274, 275.

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mystic crushed by the brute force of the world—then indeed His Cross is the symbol of defeat and the darkest pessimism is the only creed possible to man.

But the student who reads the Gospel history in the light of our newer knowledge knows that so to think of Christ is grievously to misunderstand Him. For it is an indisputable fact that *there was no historical necessity for the crucifixion*. The necessity was constituted by the spirit, the purpose, the aim of Christ.

His death was a means to an end and that end was the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. In freely offering Himself to death He conquered death.

To the last His will remained unbroken; the will to love rose up like a mighty rock against which the billows of human crime and passion broke in vain. He died pitying with His latest breath the men who slew Him.

From that day the Kingdom of God began to come and wherever the story of

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Christ is told men cease to hate and learn to love. They pass from despair to hope. They die to the old life and rise into the power and freedom of the new.

Had it not been for His death Christ's life would have been fruitless of its due. Well says the greatest of modern critics and scholars, Julius Wellhausen, "had it not been for His death Jesus would have had no historical influence. The impression created by His career was owing to the fact that His life was not completed; nay, it had scarcely begun before it was ended."

The Resurrection was no afterthought, it was the manifestation on the material plane of a victory that had already been achieved in the spiritual realm, when with a loud cry of triumph He surrendered His spirit to the Eternal.

The being who could use death, man's last and most intractable foe, as the instrument of His will to love, is a being whom we are called upon not to pity, but to worship, a being through whom we can most

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fitly interpret God and through whom we can realize that the religion which is to hold man's permanent loyalty must be one in which God shares our sorrows and pains, but in which also He is forever transcending it in victory and joy.

In this high region we can speak only in parables and symbols. Nevertheless, it is a true and deep instinct which bids us believe that there is no extremity of distress or exile foreign to the experience of God, as there is none so poignant as to be able to defy the transmuting energy of His love.

IX

THE DISCOVERY OF GOD

“**O**H, that I knew where I might find Him!” was the cry of an ancient which finds an echo in the heart of many a modern.

The sense of overwhelming power and iron regularity in the physical universe, the dim traces of a divine working in the courses of history, the intimations of a deep-seated demand within us for justice and right—all these leave us hungering after a more direct contact with Reality.

Beneath our cravings for health, for the good things of this life, for satisfaction of intellect and heart, lies the deepest craving of all—to possess God and be possessed by Him.

Sometimes this truth is flashed upon us,

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and in a moment we are caught in the grasp of a passionate desire to see God and be at one with Him. But this very desire, whether weak or strong, is itself the proof that He is already within us.

Our search after God is intelligible only in virtue of the presence of the Divine Spirit who prompts the search. "Thou wouldst not seek me unless thou didst possess me," are the words which Pascal represents God as addressing the human soul.

This is the conviction from which we start; our longing for a true communion with the Divine is proof that the Divine is near at hand. Yet it also remains true as a great mystic has put it, "Man is not blessed because God *is* so near him, but because man *knows* how near God is to him."

How then shall we know His nearness? There is a genuine sense in which we may say that we cannot know anything whatever, without knowing God. Wherever the mind rests, whether it be the world of

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objects without, or the world of faith and hope and love within, we are in the presence of something akin to ourselves. Personality knows only personality; spirit knows only spirit.

Still, this presence does not appear in consciousness by physical necessity, but only in response to a free act of attention on our part. In other words, if we would realize God's being and presence we must turn our attention to those acts and qualities wherein He manifests Himself most nearly to our hearts; and for this we need no super-earthly flight, no mystic trance, no straining after some peculiar and mysterious experience.

God is either in the most humdrum and prosaic life, or He is nowhere. We need not wait for an abrupt and violent wrench of the soul ere He can reveal Himself to us. In truth it is His very closeness to us that hides Him from us. When the vision comes we say, "How blind I was! How could it have been that in the presence of immortal Truth and un-

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speakable Beauty my eyes were holden, so that to me He was as though He were not?"

The first step on the way to God is to return to ourselves. We must get back to sincerity and simplicity. We must renounce any desire which we suspect as out of harmony with the best. We must obey what is highest in our nature.

When we examine ourselves we discover instincts, impulses, desires, varying in intensity and in quality. The impulse which, by its very character, claims dominion over all the rest, is the outcome of our fundamental and real self which is in God and is the organ of His thought and life. It is the impulse to be good and to do good.

This urge of our higher self may find expression in the smallest and least considered acts as in the great and uplifting experiences of life. It has been well said that, "Those of us who believe in a true light whose ever-present coming into the world lighteth every man, are beyond all

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others bound to confess that every work which is done on the face of the wide earth for love or duty is as truly communion with God as the Supper of the Lord itself can be, from the Three Hundred in the pass to the child in the slums who gives his last penny to one that needs it more than he does.”¹

Here then is the open secret. The quiet discharge of duties from a motive of love develops spirituality of character even though at first this motive should mingle with others less worthy. The home, the office where we transact our business, the casual meeting with a friend, the neighborhood in which we live—these are the great opportunities for opening up converse with our fellow-creatures, for entering into their hearts, and allowing them to enter into ours. It is this fellowship in life and service and duty that brings us into fellowship with God.

This truth is well illustrated in a recently published story of a man of business, the

¹H. M. Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God*, vol. ii, p. 328.

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owner of a large factory. He tells how, under the pressure of a painful event, he began to take an interest in his employees and to carry out plans for their material and moral good. He had rejected the idea of God which he had in his youth, but he now found God in a new and vital sense.

“At this time,” he says, “I was really wanting to believe in God, but I didn’t quite dare. I’d trained myself for thirty-odd years never to accept any conclusion until I had the facts to back it up, and I hated to commit myself to something that couldn’t be actually proved. So I kept working along with my people at the factory, doing what I could to be a sort of father to them.

“The closer I got to them the more I admired them. The amount of love and patience and simple faith in the average lowly man and woman has become to me nothing sort of marvelous. Men whom I had always regarded as rather slow-witted, ordinary fellows, I found to be real heroes when I got under their skins. All the en-

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thusiasm that I had put into building up our business I put into trying to build those fellows up, to helping them make the most of themselves. Human personality became to me the most marvelous and precious and wonderful thing in the world.

“Then suddenly, one Saturday afternoon, when I was alone in the office it flashed across me that I had the proof I was looking for. The world might have created itself, I said to myself, but the world couldn't have created something greater than itself. The creature can't be greater than the creator. And human personality is greater than the world. . . . To create personality there must have been Personality. So in my office in Millersville, I found God.”¹

Now this discovery is the beginning of an endless process. It will lead to ever fresh discoveries; to the revelation of life as a mighty spiritual adventure and to the conviction that at every stage of this

¹*Finding God in Millersville*, pp. 35-38.

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journey a new splendor of God awaits the soul.

There grows up gradually within us the consciousness of the Divine Presence, the unshakable conviction that God is in direct contact with the soul. We can see in a measure how it must be so. God is but another word for the Will that wills nothing but good to all creatures; and how can we commune with this God unless we ourselves will what is good?

To put it otherwise, we find God through a temper of mind, a disposition of heart. Under the influence of this light the whole world passes through a process of transfiguration. We read the story of the Man of Nazareth, and now He stands radiant in a new glory. Formerly we had known Him perhaps as a dim and flickering figure in the misty past, or as a traditional symbol of a lifeless creed, but now henceforth we know Him so no more; He has become for us the embodiment and revelation of all that is divinest in the universe.

We look into the hearts of men. Where

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formerly we discerned nothing but evil, we now see quickening seeds of good. We are grieved by the spectacle of human suffering, all the tragedy and woe of existence; but our grief is changed into exultation as we witness how souls are set free to climb spiritual heights of which they had never dreamed in their hours of earthly comfort and content.

We read the records of war and are saddened to see how men created in the divine image deface this image in themselves and in others by bestiality and filthiness; how men die with a curse upon their lips, their hearts torn with rage and devilish hate. Yet into this hell we now see streaming beams of heavenly light, we behold something wonderful, holy and divine.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

To-day millions are making the final sacrifice freely and even gladly, for not only this generation, but for the genera-

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tions that are yet to be. There is no more futile or perverted judgment than the notion that the present war is nothing but a senseless orgy of blood-intoxicated nations and that from it God stands aloof, in Epicurean indifference or in stern condemning antagonism.

On the contrary, to a mind not hypnotized by physical horrors and calamities, the infinite Spirit is manifestly working through pain and sacrifice and cleansing as by fire, to the achievement of His mighty purpose of good—the creation of a new world out of the ruin and wreckage of the old.

Thus it comes about that we discern with intuitive certainty the fact of an ever-living Presence. To question this experience or to explain it away as the creation of fancy is to be disloyal to what is highest within us; it is indeed to turn the light that is in us into darkness.

On the other hand, to follow the gleam, to obey the imperative claim of Another and a Higher, means that sooner or later

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we will speak to Him and hear Him speak to us in the depths of our souls. And this last, which is the typical experience of the mystic, is a possibility open to every man.

The vast majority of men, even those of a highly religious and ethical type, live on the lower levels of faith. Yet no man need despair of the mystic secret, the direct touch of God upon his soul, if only he will prove loyal to the grace vouchsafed him and decline to be content with the achievement of the moment.

The Divine gifts are also Divine tasks. The highest gift of all, the mystical revelation of God in the soul, comes not as the beginning, but as the crown of a life disciplined, purged of all selfishness and sloth, ever striving and aspiring after better things.

THE END



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